

# Selective Outrage Over Aleppo Bombing

When the U.S. kills civilians while bombing ISIS's cities in Syria and Iraq, the jihadists are blamed for using "human shields" and the big media is silent, but different rules apply to Russia's attacks on Al Qaeda in Aleppo, says Steven Chovanec.

By Steven Chovanec

The United States is manipulating humanitarian concern in an effort to protect its proxy militias and its imperial regime-change project in Syria. The mainstream media and intellectual classes are dutifully falling in line, promoting a narrative favoring U.S. military aggression under the cover of "protecting civilians."

Similar arguments contributed to the invasions of Iraq and Libya, exponentially increasing the massacres, chaos and proliferation of violent extremism within those countries. These "responsibility to protect" or R2P claims are hypocritical, designed to further the interests of conquest and domination and will lead to even more death and destruction in Syria.

The United States has no stake in the wellbeing of Syrian civilians, despite the condemnations of Russia's offensive in Aleppo. This is clearly shown in the fact that the people that the U.S. is supporting are guilty of the same crimes that the U.S. accuses Russia and Syria of: indiscriminate attacks, targeting of civilians, destruction of schools, hospitals, etc.

Furthermore, the offensive in Aleppo is really no different from what the U.S. did in Manbij, a Syrian city northeast of Aleppo where the U.S. is said to have incorporated a "scorched earth policy" while liberating the city from ISIS this year by treating the civilian population "as if they were terrorists or ISIS supporters."

Arguably the U.S. conduct was even worse, as the U.S. earned the distinction of launching the deadliest single airstrike on civilians out of the entire five-year conflict, massacring at least 73 where no ISIS fighters were present. But the Manbij operation elicited no moral outcry from the media and punditry, since these were deemed "unworthy victims" given that they were *our* victims and not those of our enemies. The same can be said about the U.S. operations in Kobani and Fallujah, whereby the entire towns were essentially reduced to rubble without any R2P uproar.

Saudi Arabia as well has no concern for Syrian civilians, as it has ruthlessly besieged and bombed Yemen, with the support and help of the United States, for

two years without any concern for civilian lives. The Saudi assault has led to a humanitarian crisis arguably even more dire than in Syria, leaving at least 19 million in need of humanitarian assistance; in Syria it is estimated that a total of 18 million are in need of such aid.

Turkey as well is not concerned about civilian casualties, as is evidenced by its conduct towards the Kurdish population, yet the recent quiet by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the fate of Aleppo is indicative of an understanding reached between him with Russian President Vladimir Putin, whereby Turkey establishes a presence in northern Syria and blocks the advance of the Kurds, and in return limits its support to the rebels in Aleppo.

The real reason the U.S. is decrying the Russian operation is the fact that the U.S. is staring aghast at the near-term possibility that its proxy insurgency in Aleppo will be defeated. Not only will this mark the decisive turning point in the war, the rebels all-but being fully overcome and the Syrian government in control of all the populated city centers except Idlib, but others have argued that it could as well mark the end of U.S. hegemony over the entire Middle East in general. In other words, the U.S. is trying to turn global public opinion against the Russian effort in an attempt to halt the advance and protect U.S. rebel proxies trapped in Aleppo.

### **The Rebels of Aleppo**

So, who are these rebels? In short, they are an array of U.S.-supported groups in alliance with and dominated by Al Qaeda. During the past ceasefire agreement these rebels refused to break ties with Al Qaeda and instead reasserted a commitment to their alliances with the group. The United Nation's special envoy for Syria recently explained that over half of the fighters in eastern Aleppo are al-Nusra (Al Qaeda's Syria affiliate which has recently gone through a cosmetic name change), while according to the U.S. Department of Defense, it is "primarily Nusra who holds Aleppo."

Expert analysis concurs, as Fabrice Balanche of the Washington Institute details how these rebel alliances indicate "that the al-Nusra Front dominates more different rebel factions, including those considered 'moderate.'" He explains that Al Qaeda's "grip on East Aleppo has only increased since the spring of 2016."

It is these fighters, Al Qaeda and its allies, that the U.S. is trying to protect from the Russians, as well other U.S. intelligence assets that are likely embedded with the jihadists. The narrative that Russia is committing a humanitarian catastrophe is intended to hide this fact, as well as to shift the blame for the suffering in Aleppo off of the U.S.' shoulders. Yet it was the

U.S. support to the rebels that is primarily responsible for the suffering.

To illustrate this, the people of eastern Aleppo never supported the rebels nor welcomed them. The rebels nonetheless "brought the revolution to them" and conquered the people against their will all the same. Of the few reporters who actually went to the city, they describe how Aleppo has been overrun by violent militants through a wave of repression, and that the people only "saw glimmers of hope" as the Syrian army was driving the rebels from the area.

The people decried this "malicious revolution" and characterized the rebels' rule as a "scourge of terrorism." This, of course, was of no concern to the U.S. at the time, which now proclaims itself to be the "protectors" of the civilians in Aleppo.

Around 200,000-600,000 of Aleppo's original population fled and relocated in the government-held western part of the city. Of the civilians who remain, they are primarily the families of the fighters, who themselves are paid to stay and fight. The official numbers for those remaining are 200,000, yet the actual number is likely much lower, around 40,000-50,000.

Nonetheless, the remaining civilians who are trapped within this warzone were prevented from leaving. During the first ceasefire, humanitarian corridors were opened and the civilians were encouraged by the Syrian army to leave, yet the rebels stopped them, with reports saying the rebels went so far as to shoot at those who tried. The attempt to evacuate the civilians was condemned by the U.S., which argued that the innocent people "should be able to stay in their homes."

## **Human Shields**

The radical groups were using the civilian population as human shields in order to protect themselves, and the U.S. was supporting this tactic. Further corroborating this is special U.N. envoy Steffan de Mistura, who cited reports indicating that the rebels have been utilizing "intentional placement of firing positions close to social infrastructure, aside and inside civilian quarters."

This is because it has always been the policy of the Syrian government to separate civilians from insurgents, as it is simply much more militarily effective to fight against an enemy that is not ensconced within a civilian population. Likewise, it has always been U.S. and rebel policy to prevent this separation.

According to a knowledgeable individual with contacts with high-level Syrian officials, the U.S. and European Union always rejected the Syrian governments proposals to separate civilians from the fighters, as they explained, "because

doing so will be helping you win."

This makes sense, given that if all of the civilians from eastern Aleppo were evacuated there would then be nothing stopping the Syrian army from crushing the remaining fighters, and there as well would be no international outcry over them doing so. The source explains that "Syria's war is an urban war theater. [The] only way for insurgents to compete is to use residential areas to hide and operate out of. This is in direct contrast to [the] Syrian army who would like to fight a theater totally void of civilians."

Those claiming to be protecting Aleppo's civilians from the Russian and Syrian onslaught are in actuality using them as a means to protect the rebels' success on the battlefield. Given this, the strategy of the Syrian government has been to bomb sporadically in order to scare the civilians and force them to flee from areas controlled by the militants. This is also why the Syrian army just recently halted its advance in order to allow civilians to evacuate; the army wanted the civilians out of the picture so they could militarily defeat the rebels more quickly and easily.

If one actually were concerned about saving the civilians in eastern Aleppo, it is pretty straightforward that one would try to evacuate the civilians from the area and that the backers of the rebel groups would put pressure on them to allow this to happen. From there it would follow that all sides abide by the U.N. Security Council resolutions of which they agreed to, which call for the suppression of financing, arming and supporting Al Qaeda, for the suppression of Al Qaeda "and all other entities associated" with the terror group, and "to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Syria," of which Aleppo is one of the largest.

Unfortunately, it is only Syria and Russia that are following through on these commitments, while the U.S. and its allies are consciously blocking the effort. Western media and intellectual opinion are falling in line, took obscuring from the narrative all of these inconvenient truths that do not support the interests of the policy planners in Washington.

In this way, the major media is shown to be completely subservient to state power, drumming up support for another aggressive war based on falsities and half-truths in the exact same way that led to the continuing catastrophes in Libya and Iraq. When the U.S. was driving ISIS from Manbij, just as Syria is now driving Al Qaeda from Aleppo, killing hundreds of civilians at a time, there was not so much as a debate about it, much less an international outcry.

Yet now there are countless voices calling out to "save" Syrians by having the U.S. and its military allies bomb the Syrian military and provide more – and

more sophisticated – weapons to the rebels, ironically using “humanitarian” concerns to implement a policy that would likely lead to even more death and misery.

The rebels are dominated by jihadi extremists, and any further support to them will further strengthen the radicals engaged in a project of ethnic cleansing, conquest and reactionary theocratic governance. Bombing the Syrian army and air force would only help to further descend Syria into more chaos and more bloodshed, just as the same policies did in Iraq and Libya.

The Syrian conflict is an international proxy war and humanitarian concerns are being manipulated unscrupulously in support of interests having nothing to do with concern for innocent lives.

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